

Center for Modern Greek Studies
Greek American Oral History Project
Transcription

Tape:

Subject: Alice Elms

Interviewer: Mary Nicholson Goldworth

Date of Interview: July 15th & 16th, 2001.

Transcriber: Melissa Charbonneau

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Counter: 000

I: It is July//

Elms: //fifteenth//

I: //fifteenth, 19—, 2001, and this is the oral history for Alice Elms, and she is interviewed by Mary Nicholson Goldworth, for the Greek American Oral History Project, or Archive, and our location for the tape is at 333 Edgewood Drive—Edgewood Road in Redwood City and this is tape number one.

((Tape cuts out, cuts back in))

I: Okay, well, I'd like to start with what leads you to consider yourself to be of Greek heritage?

Elms: Well, I am born of Greek parents, both my parents are born in Greece, my father in (Nasah?), (Naousa?) ((she pronounces and repronouces the location name, unclear about spelling)), my mother in (Chios?). They immigrated to America, New York City, and that's where they had me, that's where I was born. (.) I was very involved with the Greek Orthodox Church, was baptized Greek, attended Church regularly, so that kinda started the Greek activities, the cultural part. For education they sent me to the Greek school for elementary school, and I graduated (?). I went at least once a week, and my father being strict, insisted that my two brothers and I attend Greek school. I was in charge of that task; I had to make sure they went to Greek school with me.

I: (Heh heh heh)

Elms: And (.)

I: You said something about the things you were studying in Greek school...

Elms: Oh, the basic studies were reading, writing and arithmetic. The language I knew pretty well because of in the house and with my parents Greek was spoken. My mother didn't know it, really speak Greek, my father did because he was exposed to the community, and he worked, so he was pickin' up, and learning Greek pretty much.

I: Do you mean English? (.) Did you mean English?

Elms: Yes. And he was learning English. He was mingling with American people, as we say. My mother, no, on the other hand, my mother was, the women that she met at Church, and they were all Greek, so they would pal around together.

I: Mhmm, could we go just to the filling in the information about your grandparents, like just where they came from and...

Elms: My grandparents, my father's father, migrated down from Yugoslavia, and//

I: //I'd love to have his name, his name//

Elms: //His name//

I: //in the record//

Elms: //His name was Thomas (Dauches?)

I: Mhmm, and he migrated to where?

Elms: To northern Greece, outside of (Salonica?), ah (Naousa?) and he bought lots and lots of land, fertile land that was an orchard, so he was in the agricultural business, and settled there.

I: And your grandmother was from—your paternal grandmother was—from what area did she come?

Elms: She probably came from that area//

I: //Yeah//

Elms: //And I want to say her name was (Lemonera?), her name was (Lemonera?).

I: Her last name, you mean? Oh, her first name.

Elms: (Lemonera?).

I: Okay. And your maternal grandparents?

Elms: (.) I don't know where he emigrated from. My mother's father, his name was James, James (Kalas?) And he went to the island of Chios, near Turkey, and he too bought lots of land on the island of Chios and grew gum.

I: Yes.

Elms: That, I think they call it (lastin?)

I: Yes, they call it—yes.

Elms: For gum. He married, and I believe her name was Penelope, my grandmother's name.

I: And then she was from what area, do you know?

Elms: I don't know.

I: You don't know where, okay. So let's go on to your parents, then. Who were the immigrants in the your family, and you said that they//

Elms: Ah, my mother (Galeotti?), my father Thomas, and also my mother's brother Jimmy.

I: And then the approximate dates of birth, and the country they came from? For your father//

Elms: 1890's.

I: 1890's?

Elms: 1890's.

I: Oh, okay. I had written 1880's.

Elms: No, nineties.

I: That his birth//

Elms: //Yeah. His birth?

I: Yes.

Elms: Well the (?) has to go back.

I: The date of birth.

Elms: Ah, how are we going to figure that//

I: //Yeah//

Elms: //They came to America around 1890's, so 1880's beginning would be more like it.

I: That's right, okay. Okay, and then he also came from Naousa in Greece, your father?

Elms: My father came from there.

I: Yes. Then he (.) he came to New York City as well.

Elms: He went to New York City.

I: Mhmm, and then your mother, (Galeotti?), was born around, the same time, I think?

Elms: Yes.

I: In the 18—//

Elms: //Early 1880's.

I: 1880's.

Elms: She was twenty-five when she married.

I: Okay.

Elms: That I remember for some reason.

I: So it had to be the early 1900's when she came to the United States.

Elms: Mhmm.

I: Yeah, mhmm. Okay, and she came from? You mentioned//

Elms: //Chios.

I: Yeah, the island of Chios, near Turkey. That's C-H-I-O-S. She settled in New York, but you mentioned that she had, you had told us before that she had gone first to//

Elms: //She went upstate.

I: //Upstate//

Elms: //New York, to work in my Uncle Jimmy's candy factory, (.) and she stayed there until she got married, and then went back to New York City.

I: Now you said something about your father, when he, there was a reason that he left Greece when he was sixteen years old, would you tell a little bit about that//

Elms: //Something about an unstable condition//

I: //Political, you mean//

Elms: //Political uprisings//

I: //And his family wanted//

Elms: //Ah, he was the oldest son. I think there were four brothers, and Anne was five. And he sent him to America, also to help ((coughs)) support the family, because it was such a large family. He did send money home regularly. They were very good, those boys.

I: Yeah, mhmm.

Elms: And that's how he got to New York City to a cousin's, a first cousin of his father's.

I: Now you had said that he had, he started working//

Elms: //Oh, ah he//

I: //as a teenager, really//

Elms: //A teenager—he worked!

I: That's right.

Elms: He went to the cousin's house who lived there, and it was, I remember the address too, it was West Sixty-sixth Street, New York City, between Broadway and Central Park West.

I: Oh really? (Heh)

Elms: Yes. And they found a job for him in a restaurant, and he was the handy man in the kitchen, and they taught him how to be a waiter, and he became a waiter eventually. Until he was able in his early twenties to buy a restaurant as a partner with his brother-in-law, my Uncle Jimmy. And they bought a restaurant on Broadway, big restaurant, Seventy-fourth Street. Very profitable, until '29, and they lost the restaurant.

I: I'd like to ask you some more about what happened after 1929, but just before that, would you fill in the part about your mother and how she got together with your father and what she was doing up until then.

Elms: Well she was workin' in the candy factory, living with her brother. That I know of, stayed there, until she got married and came down to New York.

I: You said something about how they arranged, they got together//

Elms: //Oh, she met my father by arrangement. It was an arranged (.) My Uncle Jimmy and the cousin arranged for them to meet, and betroth eventually.

I: Mhmm, and let's go to the part about the Crash in 1929. You had mentioned something about their trials during that's period, after that period going through the Depression, and I wondered if you have some event or some particular part of that story that you want to tell, how did they manage, what did they do?

Elms: Well, (.) I was born with a gold spoon in my mouth, and then all of a sudden I remember we hardly had enough to eat, because I was elementary school age, so I do remember that. It was a sad time, a depressing time. Of course my father was most unhappy, and my mother (.) she had to make ends meet, mended clothes. I remember going to school and I didn't have pretty clothes or decent clothes and so it was

already taken effect on me as young as I was. My father would take any job he could find to support his family of five, and then the WPA came along, remember the Work Project? (.) So he got hired to work there with them.

I: Mhmm, do you, is that something that you remember as part of your childhood? What do you remember about it?

Elms: Well that my father had to work hard.

I: At what, what was he doing?

Elms: Laborer//

I: //Laborer//

Elms: //For the WPA. He worked on that Orchard Beach project. They put in Orchard Beach. That was a big project. The boardwalk, the playground, all the park up there, they put that in. So it was laborer's work. And then I also remember the food stamps.

I: During the Depression?

Elms: Yeah.

I: Mmm.

Elms: The Depression. Everything was rationed.

I: This is before the war, before the World War?

Elms: Yeah, this was//

I: They had food stamps//

Elms: //Before the second war. Yeah, because the Crash came in '29//

I: //Mhmm//

Elms: //So you had all twelve years to go through. I remember the stamps, I remember them rationing, also the shoes, you got like two pairs of shoes a year. It wasn't very pleasant (heh heh heh) as everybody knows. Finally it ended, but we managed to survive, and in Greece the families were asking for help, but there was no help extra to send, because before both my parents were sending the regularly every month, the money and clothes in boxes to help their families.

I: And what happened afterwards, they were not able//

Elms: //No, during the Depression there was nothing extra. They hardly had enough for us. My father never survived after he lost the restaurant. My uncle picked up and went down to Norfolk, Virginia, 'cause they were building the Norfolk Navy Yard, and he opened a restaurant there and wanted my father to come and he wouldn't go, which of course in the long run was a mistake. He didn't suffer, he was fine, and my father did suffer.

I: As a child, what do you, do you have a specific recollection of that time?

Elms: Yeah.

I: You said something about shoes (heh).

Elms: Shoes?

I: Yes.

Elms: Shoes?

I: What was that, how did that work? Were you making a trip to the shoe store with a//

Elms: No, all you could have was two pair of shoes a year, and (.) they would wear out so quick, and a lot of the other students had nice shoes, and I didn't, they had nice dresses, and I didn't. My mother sewed quite a bit for me, of my clothes.

I: Can you tell a little bit about connections that your parents made to becoming Americans and American citizens? How did that apply to them, to your father and your mother?

Elms: (.) They both became citizens. My father first, because he worked. My mother, because of my of uncle's insistence that she become a citizen, he sponsored her, and he wanted her to become a citizen, and she did.

I: Okay. When your father decided to become a citizen, what did, was the consideration for him?

Elms: Working.

I: To be able to stay here.

Elms: To stay here and work, yeah.

I: So he wasn't, he wasn't planning to, he was staying in Greece and planning to go back to Greece, particularly//

Elms: //Oh really, yes. He came over temporarily//

I: //Oh//

Elms: //And the circumstances (.) made him stay. He wouldn't dare go back without any money, so he kept working with the intent of making money to go back. That I remember. (.) what else?

I: So, then when he made the decision to become a citizen, how was that connected to his being able to work?

Elms: Well, he was able to work all along//

I: //Yeah. Did it have, I wonder if it had, what special meaning it had to him to actually make that decision to become a citizen if he didn't really have to?

Elms: //(.) There was a reason you had to become a citizen then. (.) They, they wouldn't turn back, for one, and then when he bought the business, I believe he had to be a citizen for that. That was all the reason.

I: Now you mentioned your mother became a citizen because of members of the family who insisted on it. What was, you, can you tell something about what was on her mind about whether or not to be a citizen. What consideration did she have other than the other members of the family wanting her to do it?

Elms: (.) In her case, it was to the benefit of the children. (.) I don't know why. That was probably it.

I: Do you have any notion at all, any kind of a picture of what exposure either parent had about being a citizen in the United States? What were the expectations, what were the (.) considerations about how to be a citizen in this country that were maybe different from the countries they came from, their culture?

Elms: One consideration was to learn the language. And then my mother did learn some English. As a matter of fact, my father already knew and just advanced. Then he started to learn to read and write, my father. My mother did not, she just learned the language. (.) Well, she worked during the war.

I: So that was, do you see that there might be some kind of connection there between learning the language and being a citizen?

Elms: Yes//

I: //Being able to be a citizen?

Elms: Yes, and working.

I: And working.

Elms: You need to know the language to work.

I: Yes. Okay, let's go to your marriage and (.) well now, excuse me, with your parent's marriage. They each had similar backgrounds, I gathered from what you said before, but now when you got married, your husband had different background from yours. Maybe, would you tell a little bit about what his background was, your spouse?

Elms: Well, my husband is born and raised in New York City. His father is born in New York City. His mother is born in Ireland, and came over when she was young, a young girl about three or five, they came over and the family (.) the mother's name is Kenny, so the Kenny family came over as a whole family, and landed in Boston and migrated down to New York later. The father was New York. His father came from England, so that would be my grandpa.

I: So the differences between your backgrounds were, there were differences, and there, I'm wondering, how did you accommodate those different backgrounds in your case?

Elms: Well, (.) I was very ethnic, and he was not. He was, I would call, very American, very Americanized. I was getting Americanized (heh heh heh) best way I can put it. The religion, the two religions, the Catholic and the Orthodox, are not that dissimilar. (.) But also it presented a problem with the children when it came to baptizing them and raising them, that's where you usually get bogged down. So we compromised. We decided to raise the children Catholic, because of the language, to go to the Greek Orthodox Church, you need to know some Greek, and they did not know Greek. I did not teach them Greek, for some unknown reason. It wasn't fashionable in my day to speak a foreign language, so we all very American, and spoke English, and spoke it well. So therefore, the kids would not adhere to learning the language.

I: Yeah.

Elms: Yeah, that was nobody's fault but modern language, then. That would be, what, in the fifties?

I: Mhmm.

Elms: You didn't speak a foreign language.

I: Yeah. Could there would {288} a most—thing that stands out, the thing that stands out in your mind the most about relating the children to the religion and making a decision about the language.

Elms: Mhmm, yes that was a big point, a bit of a sore spot. (?) resolved because the children had to be baptized. They were pretty old when they got baptized, and the

second one was a year and a half, or two and a half years old when she got baptized, and that's, (my parents?) wouldn't adhere to that.

I: Yeah, let's go to your background in education—where did you go to school, fill us in on that. ((long pause))

Elms: I went to school in New York City, from 1A to high school. I graduated high school in June 1946. I went to Drake's Business School for a year to learn secretarial courses, and then a job as a secretary, and then I decided after about a year of that, decided to go to Columbia. I went to Columbia University for about year, and I met my husband by then. We got married in a month after we met. Back then the saying was, you go to college to get a BS, or and MRS.

I: Oh, mhmm.

Elms: So, I did get one of them (heh heh heh). So we married November '49. And we didn't have an easy. Early married life (.) because of economic situation, the war—the second war was over, not too long the boys were coming home, and the market was flooded, and he decided to go to the university, which he did. He went to university, New York University, and got his accounting degree.

I: Mhmm. So was, what was he doing during the war, then? He was quite young still wasn't he?

Elms: Yeah, yes—seventeen or eighteen. He did not finish high school. He enlisted. He finished high school when he came out of the war, I remember that. He went to Rhodes to finish high school before going to the University.

I: So, when (.) I think I wanted, I was asking about going to school and I know you had some other educational training in some years after that, but//

((Side A of Tape 1 ends))

((Side B of Tape 1 begins))

Counter: 357

I: This is tape two ((actually just Side B of Tape 1)) of the history—oral history of Alice, Alice Elms on July 17th, today, and that's 2001, and we're taking up the question of Alice's educational background as an adult, after she was married.

Elms: After I married in November '49, I started a family right away, had three children two years apart. Of course, had married life in New York City until 1961, and work conditions were so-so, but my Bill was not happy with his, so he decided to take an overseas assignment and try it out temporarily. So he went overseas to Japan first,

from '61 to '64. Tokyo, Japan, with the three children, and here we are in this foreign country. They don't speak English or anything. I speak no Japanese, it was quite a struggle. But the people were very kind to us. Then to Hawaii for four years//

I: //Before you moved to Hawaii can you remember one incident or event or person, something that happened when you were in Japan that//

Elms: //In Japan we were//

I: //paint a picture of your life there.

Elms: We would go to Tokyo quite a bit as a family. We liked Tokyo, and whenever we would cross the street, the Japanese would stop and let us across like royalty. They just doted on my two girls with their long, blonde hair. So that was, the girls found it funny. But it was sort of embarrassing, in a way, for us. We had a very good life in Tokyo. I had a maid, I had a houseboy, a driver, my two girls rode—they had their own horses, taking lessons, so it was a very good life for us very quickly. It was comfortable. So we left in '64//

I: //How did you learn, you said you learned some Japanese?

Elms: Yeah, I was able to pick up Japanese, and kitchen Japanese—enough that we could, I could communicate with the people. It wasn't much English because it was just starting to come into their schools. Oh, I gave private English lessons to about a half a dozen University, Tokyo University students in my home. I had up to ten, twelve students at one time. They clamored to learn English—not only the English, but also the English culture, the habits, the manners, especially eating habits, our eating habits. So I did that in my home, I would not go into Tokyo, 'cause I had the children, and then he wanted me home in the evening anyway. That I liked, that was very rewarding. I felt I was helping, and then when, when the, New York (?) was on, '63, '62, something like that, I was going to be in New York City at the time, and the students, the Tokyo University architecture students were selected by the Japanese government to represent, to build, to assist, to put together the exhibit in New York, and they asked me meet them there and help them with their appearance, their manners, a mentor for other than English language, which I thought was quite unusual. So I did meet them there, and I was there for whatever questions they had and whatever they wanted. Because they were very bashful people//

I: This is all during the period when you were staying in Japan?

Elms: When we were stationed in Tokyo, yes. Yes, yes. And so there was always something interesting to do, and to see. We travelled {401} the whole country we saw. And then it was time to leave in '64.

I: Now you, I know you've been to several other countries as well, so maybe you could tell, fit those in next. You said after Japan you came to Hawaii.

Elms: '64 to '68 was Hawaii. Highlight there was my oldest daughter graduated from (?) All Girl's School—high school//

I: //Where did you live?

Elms: //in Hawaii.

I: //Kauai?

Elms: //Hawaii.

I: Hawaii.

Elms: Yes, she went through four years of schooling there. She was able to finish//

I: //Where, where were you located?

Elms: Honolulu.

I: Honolulu.

Elms: Honolulu, Hawaii. And we had a lovely home in the city proper, next to the University of Hawaii. And the three kids went to school, Hawaiian schools, (heh heh) American schools, and {412} 'cause then, in Tokyo that was not the case. You went to the American military schools//

I: //Oh yes//

Elms: //and we lived on a base, an American base.

I: Were there any Greek connections when you were in Tokyo?

Elms: Yes//

I: //Get into that//

Elms: //Tokyo, there was this big, beautiful cathedral, Greek Orthodox Cathedral. And whenever we were able to, we would go into the city and go to church there. One thing that stays in my mind is there wasn't a pew in the place, just along the wall for the sick or the disabled. You went there to Church for four hours and you did not sit. Needless to say I wouldn't go for four hours and stand for that length of time. And yes, I did meet some lovely people there, one in particular, the Greek American Consulate, Frank (Scolinas?). We would meet him whenever we would come into

town, and would take him to lunch at the American club. He loved going to the American Club for some pure, American food (heh heh).

I: Mhmm. What was pure, American food there, in those days?

Elms: Well, it was typical American.

I: Which was?

Elms: Continental cuisine.

I: Continental?

Elms: Yeah. It was the office's club. It was all they had the upscale restaurant.

I: I was wondering what kind food they said to be American.

Elms: It was mostly chicken, the normal that we know, because it was a restaurant and a hotel for the Military and (?) workers in Tokyo, near the Imperial Palace, which was nice.

I: Can we move back—ahead, to Honolulu again//

Elms: //Honolulu was//

I: //I was wondering if there was a Greek connection there.

Elms: Oh yes. Yes, yes, yes. Very Greek, they had just started a Greek church on the Military base. The Greeks that were there, Greek Americans, they got enough parishioners together and started a Greek American church, and we attended that little church for the duration of four years with the children.

I: Yeah, how did your husband and children feel about going to that church//

Elms: //He//

I: //did go to Catholic church as well?

Elms: Mhmm. He did not mind that church too much because it was Greek American, versus New York City, back then, which was Greek, all Greek. We had a lot of (.) community in this church. We did a lot. It was a very active little church. Archbishop (Yachovos?) would visit and give a liturgy whenever he would come, and he would make the pilgrimage once a year, at least. He had an aunt that lived in Honolulu, with nieces and nephews, so he would come and stop by. It was good for us, because whenever he came there was a reception, and I was fortunate enough to be invited to the reception.

I: What kind of food did they serve there the Greek ((laughs as she asks this))//

Elms: //Greek food, very Greek, and a lot of the women were from the other side, and a lot of them had just come over from Greece, so their food was very Greek, delicious (heh heh heh), very good. And I went to Greek lectures there, which were interesting.

I: Mhmm. You were in Hawaii for//

Elms: //Four years.

I: Four years, and your children were then, in their teens?

Elms: They were in their teens. Catherine graduated at eighteen, so go back two, four, six, eight—eight years. The boy being the youngest of all, Anne was in a private parochial school also. The local schools were very local, and they spoke (.) they spoke Hawaiianese, for lack of a better word. So you almost had to send your children to parochial school, for the language alone, just to keep language up, because they speak different than we do.

I: Yeah. Would you tell us, tell about what other places you went, until you got back to the United States//

Elms: Okay, so we go now to 1968//

I: //Yes//

Elms: //From Tokyo to Hawaii, my husband got a promotion, so for that promotion he had to promise to go to Germany for two years. So we went to (Swaghook?), Germany, two years. That's southern Germany, right above France, the Saar, S-A-A-R, area, and I had two of the children with me. The oldest one was at the University of Munich, as a freshman. And I spent my time working at the club. I was managing a club, which was very interesting, and I picked up the trade quick. It was another kitchen, it's a big kitchen, (heh heh heh) so it's//

I: //You must have really liked that.

Elms: Not too difficult. Only problem was, I was strict. Everything had to be clean, everything had to be in order, because I'm an organized person, per say. So, that was good with my boss. It was a short tour, two years, very cold. From there, we went on to, no, we came back to California for a brief (?) 'til '74. Then he took another promotion and went to Panama City, Panama. And I was (.) I didn't have the children, I only had the boy for one year with us, and Mike was very comfortable there with the houseboy and a maid. All we did was party party. Yes, there was a Greek church in Tokyo, a very big church, a very wealthy church. All they did was

give teas and coffees, and what not, and I got tired of that, so I decided to go to school. Oh, I was friends with one of the//

I: You are talking about Panama?

Elms: Panama City. I was friends with the director of University of Panama. No, Florida State University. They have a branch there, so we were friends. I said then, wow, got to learn Spanish. He says, 'Well, why don't you come to school, my school?' So he enrolls me in his school, and I'm going to regular classes and learning Spanish, then I wanted to learn literature, so I went six months more. I was doing rather well, and I said to the director, 'Well, I'm going to quit.' I said, 'I've learned enough Spanish,' and what not, and he says, 'Why?' he says, 'You did you well, why don't you stay a year and get your AA degree? You're halfway there now.' And he is my mentor, and he coaxed me, guided me, and before you know it, I got my two year degree.

I: You did that in Panama City?

Elms: Yes, that's why I had to get to Panama, (heh heh heh) for the education, the higher education in latter years. And he says, 'Well, you did so well, you graduated with honors,' 3.6, I was disappointed, but anyway he says, 'Why don't you just continue?' And he enrolled me, you know, he held me by the hand. What better way to go through school, and before you know it, I got my BS degree, at the age of, what did we say, 51, 50?

I: You calculated about 50 or so.

Elms: Yeah, because it was '81, I got the degree, with honors. By this time I felt I accomplished something. I was rather proud of myself. And it's this man, Doctor (Kirros?) that was responsible for it. All because I got tired of partying with the ladies (heh heh heh).

I: Yeah.

Elms: And then it goes even further. The group I was in school with, the BS group, some of them were going for their masters. So they dragged me along with them. I got my master's in '84. '84 I got my master's in Human Relations. Enough credits, more credits than necessary for the master's, I could have gotten my doctorate. I was missing only six written credits, to get the written work done, and then just the thesis for the doctorate. But I couldn't, because still that transferred, he had to get transferred. We were in Panama ten years, and that was all they would let him in this position. So then we go to Europe, Frankfurt. We were there for ten years. No education in Frankfurt. I worked as a substitute. I couldn't work as a teacher because

I travelled, and you can't work as a teacher and travel, so I worked as a substitute in order to travel with my husband.

I: What was the nature of the travel in Germany, with your husband?

Elms: Oh, my husband was business. He would audit the clubs, so this took him throughout Germany.

I: As part of his work?

Elms: Oh yeah.

I: So you visited//

Elms: //The places that interesting to me, I would join him, or meet him, which was fun, a good way to travel—interesting. Plus, they paid for him, and we just paid for me.

I: Mhmm. What did you do about the language there?

Elms: Well, I really didn't—because there's enough people in Europe, there were enough people in Europe that knew English. If {553} I was able to pick some of it up, I did. I picked up some German, 'cause we lived in the heart of Germany, in Frankfurt. But I had no problem. Most of my friends or acquaintances were natives; they really weren't Americans, because I didn't live on the base. But I would attend some functions on occasion—those that were mandatory (.) functions from the military.

I: When you were there was there a Greek connection for you?

Elms: Not in Frankfurt, very little. At the beginning I had some Greek connection, but then those people got rotated, so that went by the wayside. I didn't meet any other Greek Americans. There was no church nearby, per say, for me. I sure did extensive travelling, covered three quarters of the earth.

I: About how old were you children during that time? Were they still with you at home? No, they were//

Elms: //No, they left. The oldest one left and went to the University of Munich for the first year, so that was (.) '65.

I: Mhmm. Does that cover the different countries you lived in? (.)

Elms: I guess so. (Heh heh)

I: That's quite a few countries. Then, I'd like to get your ideas about what is important to you about the ancient, ancient heritage of the Greeks. (.)

Elms: Well, the Greeks are strong for education. And their strong work ethics—you must work. You need to have, you ought to have a spirit, you don't want to call it religion, you need to have a faith. So, that's, for me that's where the religion comes in.

I: You, do you, can you describe some Greek customs, or Greek related customs and values that are important to preserve? You just mentioned several so//

Elms: Well, I mentioned education, and I can prove it by me pursuing education and getting my master's, also by insisting that my children go on for higher education. The three children brought me home their BS degree. Catherine has a master's, so I think the proof is in pudding. (.) Religion I think I'm a failure in 'cause the children do not go to church. I don't know what fate they have, but it's not spiritual, for some reason. Especially being Catherine, the girl, went to parochial school from 1A and graduated University of Santa Clara, so that's twelve years of parochial education, and she has two boys, and neither of the boys are baptized. She decided that they will choose their own.

I: Do you see, how, how does that differ from your parents your parent's generation and your generation?

Elms: Ah! Ah! (Heh heh) you have the baby, within six months he was baptized, (heh) period. Catholic is ever worse—within two weeks, a month at the latest, it's baptized. (.) They seem to be very strong in faith, and who's to say which way is better? We don't know.

I: Yeah. When you think of yourself as an American, which you are identified as an American, are there, is there anything, can you describe your feelings as seeing yourself as an American?

Elms: Well, I am considerably patriotic. I have always been, even before ((coughs)) meeting my husband, who is a World War II wounded veteran. Then I became even more patriotic by participating, respecting the flag, observing the holidays—I'm just, believing in my country.

I: What are your feelings of identity relating to Greece, or Greek culture, in contrast to the American side of it?

Elms: Identity in what manner?

I: Any way you like to see it. You know, you mentioned that when you were in the other countries you sometimes would find a Greek community or a Greek American community, so there must be, I would think there might be some part of your, the way you think of yourself that also connects with//

Elms: //Oh, I feel//

I: //your Greek background//

Elms: //I feel there's an invisible wall between me and the country—ethnic. As a matter of fact, my friends and I are American Greeks, plus, we can always differentiate the natives from the foreigners—we're the foreigners, in this case (heh heh). There's something about the way we walk, the way we talk, and even the way we think. If we get beyond the acquaintance and we can converse with them, one thing, the women in particular, are very homey, and waits on her man, whereas your American woman does not do it to that extent. They think, well they hold their living, their life, to the man, as they're thinking, because they support them. We do not, kind of, having that thinking. We think, well, we can do it on our own if we have to; it isn't true, hard to say.

I: Yeah. Have you ever felt you were discriminated against//

Elms: //Oh yes//

I: //because of your Greek or ethnic heritage?

Elms: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

I: Can you tell us a good example?

Elms: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

I: What's, what is an example of that? One or two//

Elms: //Well, in New York City, which one would not believe, I don't know if it happened to you, I was discriminated in school. I had the dark, long hair, and you're not supposed to have dark, long hair. That's for the blacks, only. Yes, very much so. And then//

I: Who was doing that?

Elms: The protestants.

I: Was it the students or the//

Elms: The students. Students, Protestants and Catholics.

I: How did they express that?

Elms: They would pull my hair. They would say you don't speak proper English. You don't dress properly. What else... those are the main ones, speaking different.

I: How was your speaking different from theirs that they would notice?

Elms: Well, I had the New York accent just like they did. Well mine, my New York accent is a little different, because of the Greek language, first. Then, the accent, so you have Greek accent, New York accent//

((Side B, Tape 1 ends))

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((Side A, Tape 2 begins))

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I: //Goldworth, on July 16th, 2001. This is the second tape and completion of the interview. We were talking about Greek heritage and discrimination, how that might have played a part in your life. Do you feel that your Greek heritage distinguished you in your social interaction with people from other backgrounds?

Elms: Where, where it made an impact was when we were living in Tokyo, Japan. They, the Japanese, were very interested in Europeans, 'cause they had no contact with them. So that's where I was very much in demand, and was, my husband and I were popular, popular to be invited to their parties, cocktail parties, dinner parties, and such. In Germany, some—not as much because they are familiar and exposed to Americans. In Hawaii, yes, Hawaii, yes. Then again, the most in Panama City, Panama. They adore the Americans down there.

I: We were talking about the Greek heritage part of it—did that come into play at all?

Elms: In the Greek church in Panama City, we were like icons, 'cause there weren't that many Greek Americans.

I: So how did you feel about that?

Elms: Oh, very proud. Very proud, especially meeting the Ambassador in Panama City, or was it the Counselor. High spots had Americans in the position, and we would be invited and introduced to them. We were welcomed and wanted. They were mostly interested in listening to us speaking, and how we dressed//

I: As Greek Americans?

Elms: As Greek Americans. What we served in our home, what our homes looked like//

I: What did you say in you were home that was more on the Greek side that distinguished you from others?

Elms: About three times out of my ten years in Panama City, I gave three open house Saint Patrick's Day parties. It was open to whomever we knew. I would guess about seventy-five to a hundred people, and I served an Irish meal--corned beef and cabbage and potatoes and the carrots and the Irish music. Nobody missed that party; they waited for it every year.

I: Yeah. That was more your husband's background, you might say.

Elms: My husband's background, his mother was from Ireland.

I: Yes, mmmm.

Elms: So that was fun. Whenever I entertained it was American.

I: Mmmm, so it wasn't the Greek type of cuisine, then?

Elms: Well, the Greek, no, no Greek cuisine. The Greek cuisine I left for the Greeks in Panama, but the Greeks from Panama would come to me.

I: Okay, well if we just talk about your, the future generations for a moment, you said that you passed on the values from your Greek background to your children for education, and is there anything you would like to add to that, yes?

Elms: Honesty, hard work. They do, the three of them, the three children had a hard work ethnic habit. Religion, we can leave that alone. What else would there be? Loyalty, if possible//

I: Would you say that that comes from your Greek background?

Elms: Yes. And honesty. The lying, my parents did not have to lie, I do not lie. Well, neither did my husbands, for that matter. What else comes from them? (.)

I: Well let's just go on to (?) part of this now. You were not in the military, but your husband was very closely connected//

Elms: //He, he worked for the military.

I: And is there one event, or one or more events that comes to your mind that was important to you about that military experience?

Elms: You better be on time.

I: Okay.

Elms: (Heh heh heh) The Greeks are not known to be punctual, so I had a lot of learning to do to be punctual to affairs, or else you do not go to the affair, if you are late. And they are organized, at organization.

I: You mentioned something about the, or not, off the tape, before, about going to veterans events now. What would you like to tell about that?

Elms: Well, I attend, my husband was in the Canadian and American first Special Service Force in World War II. That is a battalion that came from Africa to Italy and liberated Rome, and it was a huge battalion, so when they dismantled they formed a group. They had annual reunions, so we have gone to several, and when my husband died in 19—March, 1996, I continued to go. I still go until today. I will be attending one in August. They change location every year to respect the Canadians. One year Canada, one year U.S. It's, lots of veterans there, but they're passing yearly. Only because it was such a huge battalion are we able to get together. We still have about two hundred veterans left.

I: Okay, one last question, then.

Elms: You know, my life//

I: What are your reflections on your life, to this time, and how do you feel about doing this oral history today?

Elms: My life was very interesting. There was nothing boring about it, with the continuous travelling, meeting various people of all walks of life from all countries, living in different countries is fascinating. It gives you strength, it gives you self-confidence. So I have no complaints about that. About the interview, I think it's a wonderful thing for the future, especially for those I find today are not interested in their genealogy. My two—my three children, for one, are not interested in it, and too early about the grandchildren. I can't help but think, once I am gone, all this background genealogy, my two parents, is gone, and from their parents, meaning me, will be gone. So it will be lost. So I think this is a good thing. Even though my children, per say, won't (.) enjoy this, but they may or may not read it, it's hard to say. But I will give the two grandsons a copy and let them file it away for when they get around to it.

I: Okay, well, thank you very, very much. It's so interesting to do this//

((Side A, Tape 2 Ends, END OF INTERVIEW))

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